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None

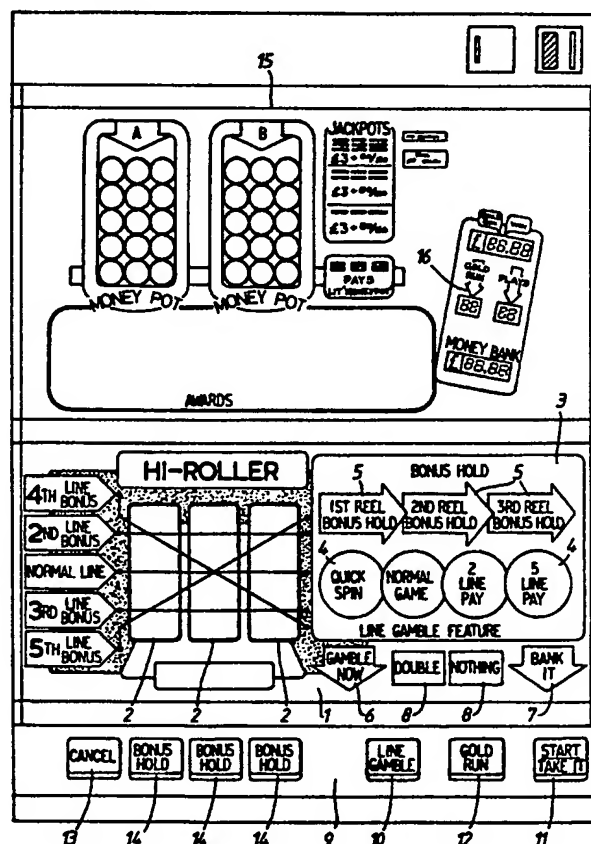
(58) Field of search

G4V

Selected US specifications from IPC sub-classes A63F
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(54) Gaming or amusement-with-prizes machines

(57) A fruit machine has windows (2) in which portions of rotatable reels appear, the reels having fruit or other symbols whose combinations across the centres of the windows determine whether or not there is a win. The machine also has a gamble button (10) which when enabled allows the player to try to increase his chances of a win by making one or more further lines of visible symbols potential win lines, generally before the reels are spun. Even if the gamble is unsuccessful the reels may still be spun. The gambling may be in more than one stage, a first success allowing the player to gamble for even more potential win lines.

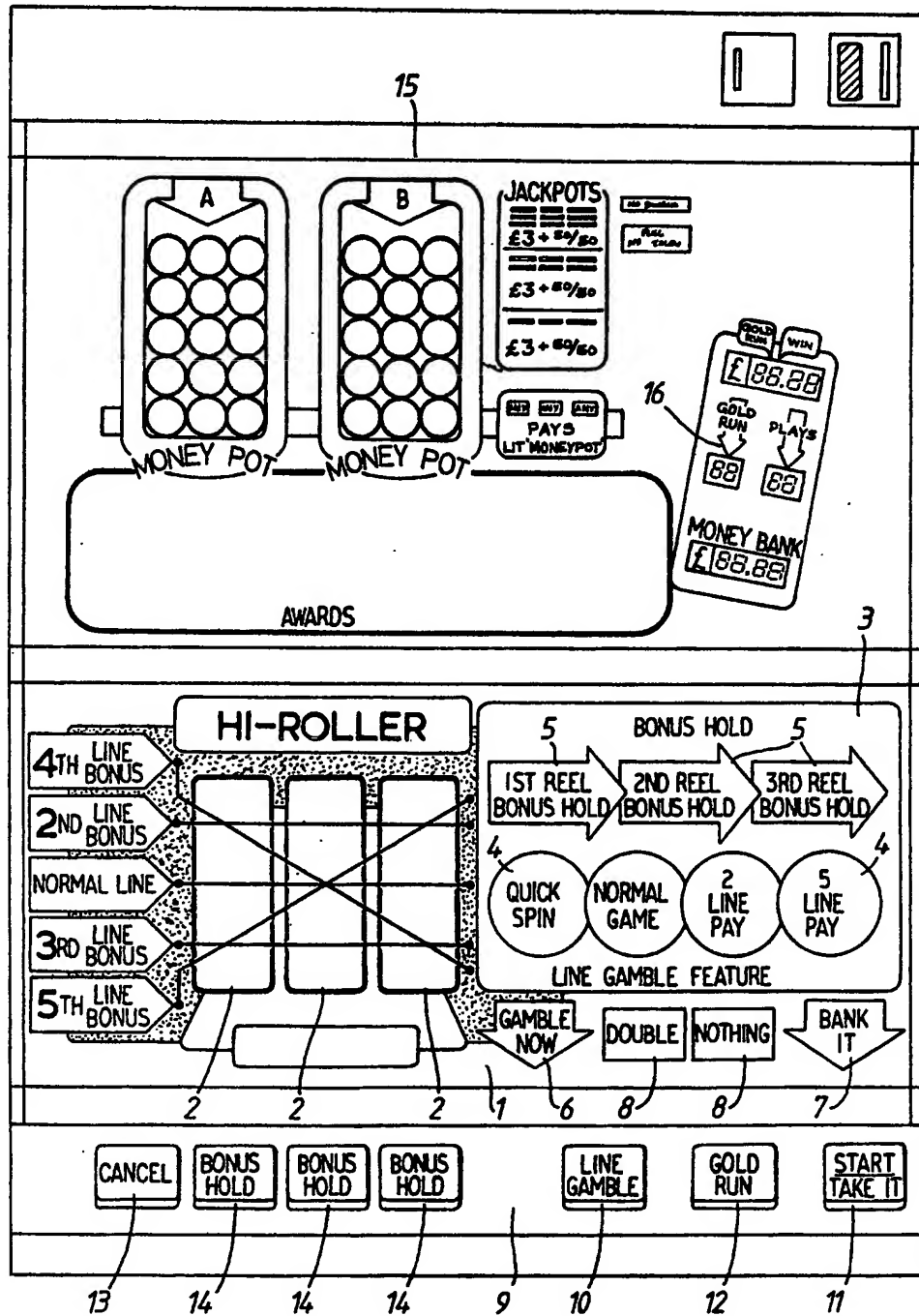


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SPECIFICATION

Improvements relating to gaming or amusement with prizes machines

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This invention relates to gaming or amusement-with-prizes machines of the kind known as fruit machines in which a series of symbols are displayed to view in a line. When the machine is operated the display changes and then stops, and if the resultant line of symbols shows a winning combination a pay-out mechanism is rendered operable and a prize is awarded and indicated.

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The invention will be described as applied to a machine of this kind in which the symbols are displayed on rotary reels, but it will be understood that it can also be applied to machines in which symbols are displayed on a device simulating mechanical reels.

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It has already been proposed that, to add interest to such a machine, it should incorporate a randomly available feature whereby the reels can be indexed round step by step from the positions in which they stop after the normal spin, known as the nudge feature.

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Another common feature is that in which individual reels can be prevented from spinning, known as the hold feature. It is also practically universal that, as well as the normal combination or win line, when the reels are stopped there are further lines of symbols visible above and below the win line. There are various gamble features by which the prizes or chances of a win are enhanced.

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It is the aim of this invention to add further interest to machines of this kind.

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According to the present invention there is provided a machine of the kind described in which a gamble feature, if successfully played, provides more than one win line from the symbols visible on the reels.

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Occasional further gambles may be allowed and continued success will then increase the number of win lines available:

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The gamble feature may be offered at each play, and it will usually be offered before a normal reel spin.

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It can be arranged that, if any such gamble is unsuccessful, the reels will still spin and a prize will be paid if there is a winning combination on the normal win line.

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A further feature that may come into effect in conjunction with this gamble feature causes the machine to select a random number of reels which can be held if the gamble is successful. This would override any normal holds. If further gambles became available, the number of holdable reels might increase.

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Another possible feature is that the line which is to be a win line is player-selectable, and this selection may be before or after a reel spin.

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For a better understanding of the invention, one embodiment will now be described, by

way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawing in which the single figure is a face view of the display panels of a fruit machine.

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The lower display panel 1 of the machine has three windows 2 in which portions of reel peripheries show in the usual fruit machine manner. In each window, when the reels have stopped after a spin, there will be three visible symbols, and conventionally the three in line across the centre are those that determine whether or not there is a win. This is still the case here, but in addition there are four other lines (the two horizontal ones above and below the normal win line and the two diagonals), which in circumstances to be described can also determine a win. These have an order of precedence as indicated on the left hand side.

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To the right of the reel windows there is a sub-panel 3 with four indicators 4 which have flashing back lights. They bear legends showing various features which are selected or randomly available. Above them there are three aligned arrows 5 associated respectively with the three reels, the first reel being regarded as that on the left hand side.

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At the bottom of the sub-panel 3 there are further indicators, which also have flashing back lights, comprising a "Gamble now" arrow 6, a "Bank it" arrow 7 and "Double" and "Nothing" indicators 8.

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Below the panel 1 there is a shelf 9 with a row of buttons whose functions are indicated on them. A "Gamble" button 10 is aligned with the "Gamble now" arrow 6 and a "Start" button 11, which also functions as a "Take it" button, is aligned with the "Bank it" arrow 7. Between them there is a "Gold Run" button 12 and at the extreme left hand end a "Cancel" button 13. Each reel has an associated "Bonus/Hold" button 14.

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On the upper display panel 15 there is various further game information including an indicator 16 whose illumination means that a "Gold run" feature, to be described below, is available and initiatable by the button 12.

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To start a game, a coin or token is inserted or credit established. The start and gamble buttons 10 and 11 flash, and if the player wants to play a normal game he will press the start button 11, whereupon the normal game indicator 4 illuminates and the reels spin. There may be holds available, the buttons 14 illuminating on a random basis.

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However, if the player presses the gamble button 10 instead, the "Quick spin" and "2 line play" indicators on the panel 3 will flash alternately, showing that the gamble has been taken, and then stop with one of them remaining lit. If this is the "Quick spin" indicator, then the gamble is lost and the reels spin off at high speed. However, when they stop, if there is a winning combination on the normal win line there will be a pay out.

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If it is the "2 line pay" indicator that remains lit then the player again has two choices. He can press the start button 11 for the normal reel spin, or the gamble button 10. If he chooses the former, when the reels stop the combination of symbols on the second line (the one above the normal win line) can also generate a prize. But if the gamble button 10 is pressed, then there is further alternate flashing, this time between the "Quick spin" and "5 line pay" indicators. If it stops on "Quick spin" the reels spin off rapidly as described above. The second win line is then no longer available, but the normal one is. However, if the flashing stops on "5 line pay", the player can press the start button 11 and at the end of the reel spin all five lines will be taken into account in determining a prize.

It is intended that the player should always be offered the initial choice between a normal game and gambling for a multi-line pay. However, it could be arranged that the feature game is less frequently available, on a random basis for example.

It will be understood that instead of offering "2 line pay" and "5 line pay", there may be alternatives, for example "3 line pay" only, or different combinations. A more complex machine could make selections from all possibilities up to "5 line pay".

As mentioned above, the hold buttons 14 will illuminate on a random basis to enable the player to hold some reels while the rest are spun. With less frequency, there will also be available a "Bonus hold" feature, manifested by the arrows 5. When the "Gamble now" arrow 6 flashes to offer the player a chance of "2 line pay", at the same time the arrows 5 may illuminate. This may be by progressive stages from the left, and then cycling back to go through the arrows again, and so on.

If the player opts for the normal game, he can use the normal hold buttons 14 as usual and then press the start button 11. The "Bonus hold" feature will be cancelled by this operation.

However, if the player chooses to gamble, aiming for a "2 line pay", then any normal holds that are indicated by the buttons 14 are cancelled, but one or more of the "Bonus hold" arrows 5 may be lit, starting from the left. Whichever arrows are lit shows the reels that can be held if the "2 line pay" comes up. If the gamble fails then there is the quick spin as described, but if it is successful the player has two lines from which to assess whether or not it is worth holding certain reels.

If the player gambles further for a "5 line pay", then the illumination of the arrows 5 may progress to allow more holds. Thus, if successful, the player may have the option of holding all three reels, and he can assess five lines to determine how to proceed. For example, if there is a winning combination on

any of the lines, then the win can be taken by holding all the reels and then pressing the "Start/Take it" button 11. He might, of course, have this option at the "2 line pay" stage.

The machine also offers a "Gold run" feature whose indicator 16 is on the upper display panel 15. This may be available either by player choice, the button 12 being pressed when its availability is indicated by illumination, or by random selection within the machine. This feature is only available when tokens are used to energise the machine, but the pay out will be in cash, and will run at a higher percentage than for normal play. Also, the machine will operate only on autoplay.

It will also be arranged that when a "Gold run" is operational, coin lock-outs will deenergise so that additional coins cannot be inserted in the hope of prolonging the "Gold run".

The distinguishing of five lines can also provide another feature in which the player can choose which line (if there is to be only one) is to be considered the win line. A further button may be provided on the shelf 9, and when this feature is available the line indicators to the left of the reel windows 2 would illuminate the sequence with reasonable pauses on each so that the player could make a choice by pressing the button at the appropriate time. That indicator would remain lit, and after a reel spin it would be the symbols on that line which would determine whether or not there was a prize.

Alternatively, this line choice might be offered after a reel spin, which would be equivalent to collective nudging. It could be made more difficult by increasing the speed of cycling through the line indicators.

In a further embodiment, there may be a hold feature in which initially all the reels index slowly in one direction through a given number of symbol positions, and then back again either through the same number or different. Generally it will be arranged for each symbol initially visible to have the chance of coming into the win line at some stage.

The hold buttons would of course be operated when the desired symbols came on to the win line. Thus, if a diagonal was showing a potential win, the player would first operate the central hold button, then one of the others after the two outer reels had moved one symbol position. He would then wait for the last reel to move back until the third symbol was on the win line.

A potential certain win may not always be visible, but the player could opt to hold one or two reels, and then spin the remaining one or two when the collective indexing had stopped.

CLAIMS

1. A machine of the kind described in which

a gamble feature, if successfully played, provides more than one win line from the symbols visible on the reels.

2. A machine as claimed in claim 1, wherein occasional further gambles are allowed, and continued success increases the number of win lines available.

3. A machine as claimed in claim 1 or 2, wherein the gamble feature is offered at each play.

4. A machine as claimed in claim 1, 2 or 3, wherein the gamble feature is available before a normal reel spin.

5. A machine as claimed in claim 4, wherein, if a gamble is unsuccessful, the reels will still spin and a prize will be paid if there is a winning combination on the normal win line.

6. A machine as claimed in claim 4 or 5, and including a further feature which may come into effect in conjunction with the gamble feature to cause the machine to select a random number of reels which can be held if the gamble is successful.

7. A machine as claimed in claim 6 as appendant to claim 2, wherein, if further gambles become available, the number of holdable reels may increase.

8. A machine as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the line which is to be a win line is playerselectable.

9. A machine as claimed in claim 8, wherein the win line selection is available before a reel spin.

10. A machine as claimed in claim 8, wherein the win line selection is available after a reel spin.

11. A gaming or amusement-with-prizes machine substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying drawing.